

**Illinois River Coordinating Council
August 12, 2008 Meeting Minutes
Ottawa Boat Club
Ottawa, Illinois
1:30 pm**

Call to Order:

Marc Miller, Office of Lieutenant Governor Pat Quinn, called the meeting to order at 1:30 pm, and welcomed members and guests.

Roll call:

Miller called the roll:

Citizen Members

Doug Blodgett, The Nature Conservancy of Illinois; Daphne Mitchell; Margaret Frisbie, Friends of the Chicago River; Wendell Shauman, Illinois Farm Bureau; Richard Worthen.

State Agency Members

Debbie Bruce, Illinois Department of Natural Resources; Joseph Bybee, Illinois Department of Agriculture; Terry Weldin-Frish, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity; Marcia Willhite, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency.

Ex-Officio Members

Ivan Dozier, USDA Natural Resources and Conservation Service; Lt. Erick Johnson, US Coast Guard; Don King, USDA Farm Service Agency; Bill Kruidenier, University of Illinois, College of Agriculture, Consumer and Environmental Sciences; Marshall B. Plumley, US Army Corps of Engineers, Rock Island District; John Rogner, US Fish and Wildlife Service; Matt Sprenger, US Fish and Wildlife Service; Christine Urban, US Environmental Protection Agency; Doug Yeskis, US Department of Interior, US Geological Survey.

Approval of Minutes

Mitchell moved to approve May 7, 2008 minutes, Worthen seconded. Minutes were approved unanimously.

Lt Governor Remarks

Lt. Governor Pat Quinn encouraged everyone to stop by the State Fair tent and learn about rain barrels and gardens. There is a free drawing to win one of three painted rain barrels. Austin Grammer, of Austin Grammer's Green Garden Products, in Champaign donated the barrels. There is also an online entry form for those who cannot travel to the fair at www.CleanWaterIllinois.org.

The Office is conducting outreach to communities to develop rain barrel programs. While improving the gray infrastructure is very costly, stormwater runoff can be reduced by promoting green infrastructure, like installing rain barrels and rain gardens.

The Village of Lisle has rain barrels on the street corners all across the downtown area, which they will be auctioning off. Lisle will also be hosting the municipal sustainable symposium on October 24, 2008.

Member Comment

Frisbie commented on the Illinois Pollution Control Board (IPCB) hearing concerning Chicago area waterways and the Lower Des Plaines River, designating uses for water and water quality standards that protect uses. The hearing is set for September 8 - 10, 2008 at the Thompson Center in Chicago.

Urban commented on the large coalition of support for improving the standards in the Chicago area waterways and the Lower Des Plaines River. Since IRCC was briefed last winter, with the support of Lt. Governor Pat Quinn, nearly 100 people have written letters in support of the improved water quality standards. At public hearing in early June, over 100 people came, 44 people testified, and 43 people were in support. The announcement for the hearing will be posted on the IPCB and Friends website.

The proposed water quality standards will address three major areas of treatment: 1) bacteria disinfection, 2) temperature, and 3) chemical standards adjustment.

Plumley commented that the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has developed a map of Illinois River Restoration Projects. The document describes all the projects and programs the Rock Island District is managing in the Illinois River basin.

Plumley provided an update on the Illinois Riverfont Island Project at Peoria that can greatly reduce flooding on the Illinois River. USACE – Rock Island District has submitted the project to contractors. Phase I of the project will include building the perimeter of island with dredging to fill the island, and will be funded federally. Phase II will expand the dredging to build the island up. The state has provided enough funds, but more federal money will be needed for the project.

Bruce stated that the Energy and Water Appropriations, House and Senate bills have \$0 for Illinois River Basin Restoration. The appropriations should include funding for Phase II of Peoria Island in FY 09. It will take \$4 million of federal funds in FY 09 budget to continue work without additional project delays and costs. There could be stability issues with a half-built island if it takes year or two for the appropriations.

Plumley also commented that other projects on the Illinois River are in jeopardy. Federal funding was reduced from \$1 million annually to \$400,000 per year. The lack of both funds and a state capitol bill will result in the reduction of project implementation.

Mitchell moved to send letter to the congressional delegation to receive dollars for Phase II of the Peoria Island Project. Seconded by Worthen. Motion passed unanimously.

Welcome and Ecotourism in Ottawa – Mayor Robert Eschbach

Mayor Eschbach stated that Ottawa has a very rich history, it was built as a canal town, and several important historical events shaped the area. The first of the Lincoln - Douglas Debates took place in Ottawa. The Illinois and Fox Rivers join in Ottawa and they play an ever more important role in the city's economic development. Ottawa initiated a large project to build a resort and arena and they are spending \$600 million dollars to build it with green infrastructure.

Stormwater in LaSalle County – Jerry Hicks, LaSalle County Board Chairman

Hicks stated that the recent 100 year and 500 year flood waters on the Illinois River shows the importance of addressing stormwater flooding issues. Citizens of La Salle County need to be assured resources are available when flooding occurs. Through PA 94-0675 the County has the authority to establish Water Resource Commission. A referendum for the stormwater management plan was put on the ballot in February and it passed by 56%. The first step, a Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan provides a blue print for reducing impact of natural hazards on people and their property. Their goal is to see the Water Resource Commission established by September.

Worthen moved to send a letter to encourage river municipalities who constantly experience stormwater problems to participate in the LaSalle County Water Resource Commission. Seconded by Frisbe. Motion passed unanimously.

Flooding In the Illinois River Basin – Rita Lee, Office of Water Resources, DNR

Lee presented information showing that the Illinois River watershed experienced an above average precipitation for most of 2008. One and one-half times the normal precipitation fell over the entire Illinois River Basin in the winter.

2008 Timeline:

1. Early January: the eastern part of the watershed received heavy rainfall. Substantial flooding occurred on the Iroquois River in Watseka, and the Vermillion River in Pontiac. Minor flooding occurred in Kankakee, Mackinaw, and the Upper Illinois River.
2. End of January: high flows and severely cold temperatures caused an ice jam to form on the Kankakee River downstream of I-55 with flooding near Wilmington.
3. Early February: rainfall caused substantial flooding again on the Iroquois River in Watseka. Minor flooding occurred on the Sangamon River.
4. April: heavy rainfall in Wisconsin and northern Illinois caused minor flooding on the Fox River and Des Plaines River.
5. Early June: heavy rainfall in the southern portion of the Illinois River watershed in caused moderate flooding on the Sangamon River in Monticello, Decatur, and Petersburg.

6. Mid June: heavy rainfall in Wisconsin caused moderate flooding on the northern parts of the Fox River and Des Plaines River.

Levee Maintenance and Landscaping – Kevin Holden, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Rock Island District

Holden discussed levee standards for safety and maintenance. Levees must be open to vehicle inspection and resist erosion. Vegetation must be lower than three-inches, obtained by mowing or burning. Grass is the only vegetation that meets these standards. Large tree roots can cause structural damage and water piping. Research is being done on what other ground covers can meet those criteria and how USACE can be more flexible with grass species while addressing environmental concerns.

McDowell and Warrenville Dam Removal – Jessi DeMartini, Forest Preserve District of DuPage County

DeMartini discussed a remediation plan on the West Branch of the DuPage River to remove two dams. The river will be temporarily redirected and they will remove 40,000 cubic yards of sediment, and set up a riffle system. This project is being completed as part of a superfund site on the west branch of DuPage River. The superfund project allowed for the opportunity to remove the sediment in conjunction with the site, reducing the costs greatly.

Sedimentation in the Upper Fox River - Ingrid Ruttendjie, Fox Waterway Agency

Ruttendjie reported that the Fox Waterway Agency (FWA) has proceeded with a few new initiatives. One is a beneficial sediment reuse project which will remove sediment from the Fox River Chain O'Lakes and sell the dried topsoil. Another project is remediation of 80 acres of bogs that broke loose during recent flooding.

Illinois River Working Group-NESP proposal, IRCC prioritization responsibilities, funding issues – Marc Miller, Lt. Governor's Office

Milled stated that the Illinois River Working Group proposal has advanced and is being considered for inclusion in the Corps of Engineers planning process. Over the summer, IRCC members/stakeholders have attended several meetings to advance this issue.

It is important that the state continue to work with other upper Mississippi River states (IA, WI, MO, MN) to advance NESP and increase funding overall for river restoration (on par with other large ecosystem restorations, i.e. Everglades, Chesapeake, etc.).

The Office will propose appointments prior to or at the next IRCC meeting for the Working Group, and begin to expand the IRCC Science Advisory Committee to include additional scientists/research personnel to assist this expanded mission.

Farm Bill, Conservation Title – Ivan Dozier, Natural Resource Conservation Service

Dozier reported on the status of Farm Bill programs. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) has been expanded. A new sub-program is the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program that will focus on water conservation. Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) will promote this program through education on how to conserve energy while irrigating. There will also be additional emphasis on organic producers through EQIP. The payment limit has been dropped from \$400,000 to \$300,000 but is expected to effect less then 4% of participants in Illinois.

The Conservation Security Program is now the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). The program will honor all the old contracts as they are. They will only have five-year contracts rather than 10-year contracts and a payment limit of \$200,000 for any individual or legal entity.

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) has changed its rules and is almost identical to the EQIP program. It will dedicate funds to wildlife habitat; however some local governments and non-government organization will not be able to participate in the WHIP program.

Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) is the now largest easement program and the Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program will be open for local and state programs to partner. The program will also allow public access to lands. New technology will streamline the application process. A new aspect to the program will be an ownership requirement of seven years, up from one year.

More opportunities will be offered for beginning or socially disadvantaged farmers. 5% of EQIP and 5% of CSP funds will be dedicated to those groups and those farmers are eligible for a higher rate of cost-share, 90% instead of 75%.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) will be continued. It went from 34 million acres nationwide down to 32 million acres. CRP is still authorized in Illinois, but is closed until the state to open up funds for more acres. We currently have 110,000 acres in the Illinois River basin and 232,000 acres across the state.

It's Our River Day – Daphne Mitchell

The 4th annual It's Our River Day will be the weekend of September 20, 2008. It's Our River Day is a celebration of Illinois rivers through conservation, recreation and education. Mitchell encouraged everyone to visit the Lt. Governor's website for information at www.CleanWaterIllinois.org. We have several clean-ups along the Illinois River and other educational and recreational events will be hosted throughout the state.

Other Business

Next meeting will be November 6th at the Midewin Tallgrass Prairie in Joliet at 1:30.

Public Comments Period

Michael Fischer announced the creation of a new organization, the Calumet Watersheds Action Coalition. He is the Executive Director for the group and it will focus on the Calumet River, Lake Michigan shoreline, and adjacent rivers and lakes.

Stacy James of Prairie Rivers Network stated that Illinois is the number one contributor to nitrogen and phosphorus pollution to the Gulf of Mexico. Predominant sources of nutrient pollution are runoff from agricultural fields and sewage treatment plants. Illinois can reduce its contribution by adopting standards to limit the amount of nitrogen and phosphorus discharged by point sources. Additional measures to reduce sources of nonpoint nitrogen and phosphorus pollution include improving drainage management, wetlands, riparian buffers, and greater implementation of spring only fertilizer application. Where funding is possible, projects should be given priority based on their contribution to nitrogen and phosphorus pollution.

James also commented that the tragic flooding of this spring is a reminder that the state should be working to increase the number of cost-share agreements. In November of 2007, Congress passed the new WRDA which contains \$5.7 billion for NESP, the Upper Mississippi and Illinois Rivers. During the initial 15 years of NESP, \$1.7 million has been dedicated to construct 277 restoration projects mostly on federal land. There is a 35% cost-share with projects on state owned land. Illinois' cost-share obligation for the first 15 years was \$67million for construction and \$24 billion for operations and maintenance over 50 years.

Karen Miller, president of the Fox River Ecosystem Partnership, invited everyone to a meeting on Farming and the Environment. The meeting will take place Wednesday, August 27, 2008, at noon, at the Kane County Farm Bureau in St. Charles.

Wilhite commented that the IEPA is developing water quality standards for phosphorus.

Frisbe commented that Friends of the Chicago River will be hosting a canoe and kayak race on October 5, 2008, and encourages all to come and paddle through downtown Chicago.

Dozier commented on the Emergence Watershed Program. Illinois was one of the states where almost every county was in the disaster area. As NRCS gets requests from sponsors they will fill out damage reports before repairing infrastructure at municipalities, drainage districts, and other local governments.

Adjourn

Miller adjourned the meeting at 3:40.